CHURCH HISTORY

Chapter 36 – The Methodists

1. ***The Wesleys***

   a. *Samuel Wesley was a minister in the Church of England in the rough country parish of Epworth. His wife was Susanna Annesley, a woman of unusual strength of character, nineteen children were born from the couple, but eight died in infancy - the fifteenth child, John, and the eighteenth child, Charles, were destined to become important in the history of the Church*

2. ***The "Holy Club"***
   a. *John was chosen a Fellow of Lincoln College and took on holy orders and was therefore ordained a deacon in 1725, and three years later he was ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church of England*
   b. *Charles, together with two other students, formed a club for the promotion of their studies. Soon they were spending a good deal of time in reading books that might be helpful to the Christian life; the members of the club were known to live very regularly according to a definite method as some student started to call them* Methodists

3. ***In America the Wesleys Meet the Moravians***
   a. *Count Oglethorpe issued a call for missionaries to come to America and preach in his newly established colony of Georgia*
   b. *The trip to America was for the Wesley's a failure as far as mission work was concerned. Yet the Georgia episode was of great importance in the life of John Wesley, 'because of his experiences and the people he had met*
   c. *For ten years John Wesley had fought against sin and had tried to fulfill the law of the Gospel "…he had not obtained freedom from sin, nor the witness of the Spirit, because he sought it, not by faith, but "by the works of the law"*

4. ***The Wesleys Are Converted***
   a. *On May 21, 1738, Charles, then suffering from a serious illness, experienced conversion and three days later that same experience came to John*
   b. *Wesley has left a record of his experience at this time:* "About a quarter before nine, while I was listening to Luther's description of the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

5. ***Religious Conditions in England***
   a. *The Industrial Revolution took place and this new industrial age brought with it great changes in the lives of the English people*
   b. *Religious conditions in England at this time were deplorable*
   c. *the publication in 1707 of Isaac Watts' Hymns, and in 1719 of The Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of the New Testament; the songs of Isaac Watts (appropriately been called "the founder of modern English hymnody") give expression to a deep and vital piety*
   d. *growing in wealth and power but religiously stagnant and morally corrupt – an England lighted by only a few stray and feeble gleams – that John Wesley, with the help of his brother Charles and their friend George Whitefield, began his mighty work*

6. ***John Wesley Is a Remarkable Preacher***
   a. *Preaching in the open fields instead of in a church was something entirely novel. John Wesley hesitated very much to engage in that kind of preaching; On April 2, 1739, Wesley preached his first sermon in the open air*

7. ***Methodist Societies***
   a. *anyone who was interested could become a member of the societies that existed before Wesley*
   b. *In 1742 Thomas Maxfield became the first lay preacher (a man who is not trained and ordained as a minister)*
   c. *Annual Conferences, which have been called the crown of the Methodist system of organization started in 1744*
   d. *began the system of* itinerant (traveling) preachers, *which has since then become an important feature in the life of a number of denominations*
   e. *Charles Wesley also rode the circuit for many years. His wife, who was a woman of wealth, accompanied him on his travels, riding behind him on his horse. She led the song services at the meetings her husband conducted*

8. ***The Methodist Church Comes Into Existence***
   a. *on September 1, 1784, in Bristol, Wesley ordained two men. He himself did not think so at the time, but actually this act of his was a break with the Church of England. The Methodist Church had come into existence*
   b. *Charles Wesley died in March 29, 1788, and John on March 2, 1791*

9. ***Wesley's Methods***
   a. *Wesley preached in the open air; Wesley preached anywhere that he saw the need for his preaching and thus the famous line* "The world is my parish."; *and Wesley engaged un-ordained men to preach*

10. ***Wesley's Doctrine***
    a. *Generally Wesley's theology was that of orthodox Protestantism - believed firmly in the deity of Christ, in miracles, and in the supernatural character of religion; believed in and practiced infant baptism; Wesley was an Arminian*
    b. *he felt that Calvin's doctrine of predestination and election would stifle the call to repentance and conversion*

11. ***Wesley's Influence***
    a. *chiefly he had built up his church out of people who before had not belonged to any church*
    b. *Wesley imbued with the spirit of evangelism, so that old churches enjoyed a new growth and prosperity*
    c. *Much of the ignorance, coarseness, brutality, and drunkenness disappeared from English life. Some outstanding people were influenced by Wesley's work. Among them were* John Newton, *a hymn writer;* William Cowper, *the greatest English poet of the latter half of the eighteenth century;* William Wilberforce, *who helped bring the fight against slavery to a victorious close; John Howard, who did so much for the reform of the unspeakably bad prison conditions; and* Robert Raikes, *the father of Sunday schools.*